

Save Longstone Edge Campaign

Save Longstone Edge Group Newsletter – November 2008

The future of Longstone Edge will be decided in the Court of Appeal in February. Immensely frustrating though it is, nothing can be done to halt the further destruction at Backdale in the meantime. SLEG is continuing to put pressure on the Government to find a long term solution.

Much has happened since SLEG's last public meeting held in Calver Village Hall on 8 April. At that time we were all angry from the shock of the March High Court decision to overturn the Inspector's report that had imposed a limit on the ratio of limestone to fluorspar that could be taken from Backdale and Wager's Flat.

On 24 April two of us met Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment, thanks to the support of Patrick McLoughlin, our local MP. Hilary Benn was clearly shocked by the destruction at Longstone Edge, and told us that he would consider what the Government could do to help. Shortly afterwards Jonathan Shaw, a junior minister at the same Department, told Patrick McLoughlin that DEFRA was working closely with the National Park Authority to try to find a long term solution.

In May, Mr Harpley, the owner of Backdale, told a journalist that he was "open to a settlement." However, since then he has extended the area of Backdale Quarry by at least one-third and the pace of destruction has accelerated. This may be related to a decision by a tax tribunal that the quarry operator, MMC, should be paying Aggregates Levy on the limestone taken from Longstone Edge. We understand that MMC is appealing against this decision, so the final outcome will not be known from some time. If the appeal is unsuccessful, MMC are likely to face a very large bill, which could put them out of business.

In July, The Court of Appeal gave the Government and National Park Authority leave to appeal against the March High Court decision. They also decided that this appeal should be expedited. We have recently heard that the Court of Appeal will hear the case on 11 and 12 February next year.

So once again we face a frustrating wait for the legal system to make another decision on the future of Longstone Edge. In the meantime we think it is very unlikely that Hilary Benn will make any firm commitment on behalf of the Government, though we do believe that he will want to do so if necessary. We believe that he has been impressed by the support our campaign has from MPs from all three main political parties and by the fact that the CPRE, Council for National Parks, Ramblers, Friends of the Earth, British Mountaineering Council, Plantlife and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and Save Longstone Edge Group are now campaigning jointly.

While we wait for the Court of Appeal, we have to accept, with great reluctance, that nothing can legally be done to stop the continuing destruction at Backdale. We are urging the County Council to take action on the threat to Bramley Lane posed by quarrying at Backdale, and we are pursuing concerns about the effect of dust on workers at the quarry.

I hope to have better news in the New Year.

John Lambert - Chairman, SLEG